

US-Japan trade flare-up

Washington feels ahead, not behind

NEW YORK, Feb 17: The flare-up in trade tension between the United States and Japan is happening in a much different atmosphere than earlier disputes — America feels ahead instead of behind.

That's chiefly because the US economy is growing while Japan is in a recession.

But US companies also have learned many lessons from the Japanese in the past decade, adopting some business practices and rejecting others.

Those changes produced such strength in previously worrisome industries, like automobiles and computers, that some Japanese news accounts have dubbed the United States the "Rising Sun." The cover art of a recent issue of Nikkei Business magazine, for instance, showed Uncle Sam looming over the Pacific.

Such perception gives US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor extra leverage in threatening sanctions against Japan, as he did Tuesday. But it also projects a bully image to Japan at a time when its resources and choices are limited.

"It's ironic that the American administration has come around to getting tough at a time when it looks like we'll do perfectly fine without expending so much energy in this respect," said Gerald

US-Japan trade tussle darkens meeting between JAMA, MEMA

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 17: Growing trade friction between the United States and Japan is casting a shadow over a crucial meeting here between Japanese carmakers and US car parts makers aimed at increasing business, reports Reuter.

A conference of the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association Inc. or JAMA, and the Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association, or MEMA, began Monday, just three days after President Clinton announced the breakdown of trade talks with Japan.

Trade in cars and car parts was one of the sectors included in the failed framework trade talks. Washington is concerned about the big US deficit on vehicles trade with Japan, which currently runs at about 21 billion dollars in vehicles and 10 billion dollars in auto parts, according to Japanese Data.

While Japanese and US delegates say they are concentrating on business at this meeting, the darkening trade picture looms.

MEMA Chairman Dale Johnson said in a speech to the conference that "many of us are concerned about the breakdown in the US-Japan framework talks".

Christopher Bates, MEMA's Director of Policy Analysis, said Japanese purchases of US car parts were growing but not as fast as the US industry would like.

USDA approves use of genetically altered cotton seeds

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: Genetically-altered cotton seeds designed to increase yield and cut back on herbicide use were approved Wednesday by the US Department of Agriculture, reports AP.

The seeds could reduce a farmer's use of chemical weed killers by as much as 40 per cent, said the developer of the seeds, Calgene Inc. of Davis, Calif.

The seeds had been tested for four years.

The first plant product to be approved by the Department of Agriculture, a genetically-altered tomato, also was created by Calgene. Flavr-Savr tomatoes are supposed to stay ripe longer.

The USDA approved Calgene's application about a year ago, but Calgene is withholding the tomatoes from the market while the Food and Drug Administration determines whether they are safe to eat.

Calgene said its new product, BXN cotton, will save farmers money and production time. The seeds could go on the market as early as 1995, Calgene spokesman John Callahan said.

Cotton farmers spend about 200 million dollars a year for herbicides, but lose about 600 million dollars in reduced yields because of weeds, the company said.

"We think this is a bellwether event for biotechnology," Callahan said. "Everyone knows what biotechnology can do for pharmaceuticals, but they haven't thought yet of what this can do for agriculture."

Curtis, a Columbia University professor and author on Japanese politics.

"The way we might explain that, and this is conjecture, is the president is still campaigning," Curtis said.

Arthur Alexander, president of the Japan Economic Institute, a research and policy group supported by the Japanese government, said President Clinton's militant position on trade reflects his own political constituency.

"He won the campaign on job issues and it's been difficult for him to back away on that," Alexander said.

The core dispute is the same that's existed for years — the United States imports tens of billions of dollars more goods from Japan than Japan does from the United States. On Thursday, the government is expected to report new figures that show the 1993 US trade deficit with Japan reached \$16 billion.

Government experts, academics and others differ on the economic importance of the trade deficit, chiefly because many Japanese and American companies own subsidiaries and employ people in each country.

But it is a political liability for any American president, since imports from other countries are viewed, often er-

roneously, as costing jobs in the United States.

The last time a way of worry about Japan swelled was two years ago when President Bush led US auto and other executives on a trade trip there.

The journey was remembered most for a flu-stricken Bush vomiting at a state dinner, a detail that symbolized the meager outcome of the discussions and a perception that the United States was in sickly decline. It also led to a short-lived "Buy American" campaign in this country.

Since then, the US auto industry has rebounded strongly. Although they have yet to achieve any significant sales in Japan, sales of US-branded vehicles in the United States have been increasing at double-digit percentage rates.

The United States is expected to overtake Japan this year as the world's biggest vehicle producer for the first time in 13 years. In late December, Ford Motor Co took a bigger role in running Mazda Motor Corp, where it once turned for management lessons.

The turnaround is more keen in high technology. US companies are driving a worldwide shift from big computers to networks of less expensive, small machines. Phone and cable companies are

pushing the development of powerful voice, data and video connections.

US businesses use personal computers at four times the rate of those in Japan. One in three US households own a PC but the machines are virtually unheard of in a Japanese home.

"I strongly believe that Japan is slipping behind the US and even other industrialized nations as far as implementing computer technology," said Eric Lim, analyst at Fuji-Kirizei USA, the American subsidiary of a large Japanese market research firm.

Last year, sales of semiconductors in North America, chiefly the United States, eclipsed those in the Asia Pacific region, mainly Japan, for the first time since 1985.

Cellular phones, Kantor's first sanctions target, are used by fewer than 2 per cent of Japanese compared to about 5 per cent of the US population.

The reversal of Japan's economic fortune was displayed further on Monday, when Aoki Corp, a large Japanese property developer, said it was selling much of the Westin Hotels and resort chain. Its 1987 purchase of the chain was one of the biggest Japanese takeovers of an American business.



Shafat Ahmed Chowdhury, MD & Actuary of Delta Life Insurance Company handing over the death settlement claim cheque of policy holder Sufia Akhter to her nominee Jahir Hossain under the company's Grameen Bima project. A function was arranged to mark the occasion at the Bastuvara Kalyan Kendra, at Tongi which was attended by Grameen Bima Project Director Mahbubur Rab Saadi.

Commodity prices soaring in Senegal

Protesters kill 4 policemen

DAKAR, Feb 17: Thousands of demonstrators, some armed with clubs and cutlasses, stormed through Senegal's capital Dakar on Wednesday and officials said they killed four policemen, reports Reuter.

Demonstrators protesting against price rises following a sharp devaluation of the local currency reached the gates of the West African country's ornate Presidential Palace before they were dispersed by security forces, eye-witnesses in reply.

National radio said in its evening bulletin reporting what it called Dakar's "hot afternoon" said cars and petrol stations were set ablaze by the protesters.

The Confederation of Democratic Forces (CDF), grouping opposition parties, had organised a meeting to protest over living costs following the devaluation.

Senegal is one of the poorest countries in the world. Life became even harder for most of its eight million people after the January 12 devaluation of the CFA franc currency which sent prices soaring.

The demonstrators burned cars and overturned rubbish bins to block main streets and smashed store windows. Security forces fired tear gas in reply.

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